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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IRF

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SUBJECT: POLICE MOVE FORWARD ON CHARGING THAI HA PROTESTORS - PRAYER
VIGILS CONTINUE

1. (SBU) Hanoi police have concluded their investigation into eight individuals who participated in tearing down a small retaining wall around disputed land near the Thai Ha parish in Hanoi, according to online reports and Catholic priests at the parish. The police have recommended to prosecutors that the eight individuals be charged with the crime of "Causing Public Disorder." Originally, the police had threatened to charge the individuals with the more significant crime of "Destroying or Deliberately Damaging Property."

2. (SBU) At this point, the prosecutors will examine the evidence provided by the police and make a decision as to whether they agree with the police recommendation. If so, the prosecutors will then file formal charges with the court against the eight individuals. Following this, the court would evaluate the charges and decide if there is enough evidence to move forward with a trial. Catholic priests at the parish have verified that two parishioners remain in detention but estimate that even if the case goes to trial that the eight involved will likely only be sentenced to "non-custodial reform" and not jail time. Given the fact that the individuals have been charged with a lesser crime, the priests believe that those still in detention would likely be released at sentencing.

3. (SBU) Parish priests also confirmed that they continue to perform daily prayer vigils after evening Mass with attendance sometimes numbering in the hundreds. However, the priests have chosen to conduct the prayer vigils in the courtyard outside the Church and not at the disputed site, which is now a public park.

4. (SBU) Comment: In the most recent round of prayer vigils that began on August 14 at the disputed property near Thai Ha parish, thousands of Catholics from northern Vietnam participated for more than a month. When the prayer vigils restarted, the police originally threatened to arrest all who participated, including Catholic priests. It is a relatively positive sign that the police have ended their investigation by only charging eight individuals who led the effort to tear down the wall surrounding the property with the lesser crime of "Causing Public Disorder." END COMMENT.